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WASHINGTON
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EXECUTIVES

President Reagan Monday thanked 770 business executives who have volunteered for government service in the event of an emergency or war, and top defense officials briefed them on national security.

In a videotaped address to members of the National Executive Reserve, Reagan said the businessmen are "part of a spectrum of civil mobilization programs that we pray will never be used. Yet good judgment demands that we keep prepared.

"Thanks again for your good citizenship," the president told the reserve group, which organized in 1955.

The National Executive Reserve was founded in 1967, and the three-day meeting that began Monday at a city hotel was the group's first national conference since 1967.

Now administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the executive volunteers would serve in key government positions in a national emergency.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Army Secretary John Marsh and CIA Director William Casey were among top government officials who briefed the conference Monday. Other officials were scheduled to speak at later sessions.

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In an overall view of U.S. intelligence, Casey said the CIA has improved from a low point in the 1970s, when it lost 40 percent of its funding and 50 percent of its personnel, "but a lot remains to be done."

He said he is "reasonably confident" U.S. intelligence would be able to detect major Soviet military moves and has a "good capability" in the Middle East.

Asked during a question period why the CIA was so ineffective in assessing the strength of the Shah of Iran's opposition just before his overthrow, Casey said: "I don't know. I wasn't there. I don't know how good the intelligence was."

But he said U.S. "policy makers" were not listening to intelligence at the time.

"Today, that doesn't happen," he said. "The administration is listening."

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